



One Hundred Eleventh Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20515

July 29, 2010

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On July 27, 2010, the Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response held a hearing on the public safety aspects of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) National Broadband Plan (NBP). At the hearing, I heard testimony that, in recognition of the fact that the NBP does not fully address the interoperability challenges of the public safety community, a new joint taskforce would be created. For the reasons laid out below, I respectfully request that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) lead this new task force, insofar as DHS is uniquely positioned to give a voice to the needs of the public safety community.

At the hearing, the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Cyber Security and Communications at DHS raised numerous concerns with the NBP's proposal to auction the D Block and could not fully support the plan, testifying that the "FCC's proposal has merit, with a number of significant caveats."<sup>1</sup> One of the identified caveats is that there are significant questions about the sufficiency of the technical and legal frameworks that are being proposed for public safety to gain priority access to commercial spectrum.<sup>2</sup> That is no small matter; it goes to the heart of the interoperability challenge that came into focus during the attacks of September 11, 2001.

DHS has a statutory mission to "foster the development of interoperable emergency communications,"<sup>3</sup> and can provide valuable insight into the technical communication needs of first responders. As the leader of the joint task force, DHS could incorporate the public safety community into the body's important discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> Hearing on "Interoperable Emergency Communications: Does the National Broadband Plan Meet the Needs of First Responders?" before the Subcommittee on Emergency Communications Preparedness and Response, Committee on Homeland Security, July 27, 2010 (written statement of Greg Schaffer, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Cyber Security and Communications, DHS).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> 6 U.S.C. §571.

Regardless of how the D block is ultimately allocated, it will be important for the Administration to develop a realistic plan for funding the construction and sustainment of a public safety broadband network. Given the tight budgetary conditions that many State and local jurisdictions are experiencing, particularly in rural areas, it may be very difficult for localities to find adequate funding.

Thank you, in advance, for ensuring DHS becomes a full partner in the development of our nation's interoperable broadband network for public safety. I look forward to the Administration developing a robust, singular strategy, which is capable of being implemented efficiently and effectively and meets the needs of first responders across the nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bennie" being more prominent and the last name "Thompson" following in a similar style.

Bennie G. Thompson

Chairman

Committee on Homeland Security